



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Teton
National Park

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Grand Teton National Park News Release

LIGHTNING STRIKE ON GRAND TETON RESULTS IN ONE FATALITY AND FIVE INJURIES

Two private, recreational climbing parties were reported to have been hit by lightning around 3:45 p.m. on Saturday, July 26, while climbing the upper Exum Ridge of the Grand Teton in Grand Teton National Park. A total of six climbers were injured, including one 25-year-old female who died at the scene. A cell phone call from one of the climbers alerted park staff that the group had been struck by lightning and five people were down with various injuries.


The two groups of climbers were both ascending the upper Exum Ridge, separated by about 150 feet, when an active lightning storm moved over the Tetons. One group was climbing the Grand's Friction Pitch - a 5.5 pitch named for its smooth, relatively unbroken rock - at the time of the accident. A 25-year-old female in that group might have been directly hit by a bolt of lightning and was not breathing at the time the caller phoned in.

Park rangers immediately executed a highly technical rescue operation, which involved the use of two interagency contract helicopters, one air ambulance, three ground ambulances, an interagency helitak crew and more than twenty park personnel, including an elite corps of park rangers with specialized emergency medical and technical rescue skills. These rangers utilize a helicopter rescue technique known as the short-haul method, wherein the rangers fly, individually or in pairs, suspended from the helicopter on a double rope system. This method allows rangers to be quickly inserted to a location near the patient and thereby minimize response time for medical attention. A total of six rangers were inserted to the accident scene on the Grand Teton using this short haul technique.

Four of the five injured climbers were given emergency medical care by park rangers and individually removed from the mountain by the short haul method to the Lower Saddle, where a second helicopter then flew each climber to the Lupine Meadows rescue cache on the valley floor. Three patients were subsequently transported by ground ambulance to St. John's Medical Center in Jackson, Wyoming.

In order to assist the fifth injured climber, who was the most difficult to reach, rangers were inserted above him by short haul so they could rappel to him. Rangers provided emergency medical care and placed the climber into a litter. They used ropes to raise the litter to a point where they could rig it to fly by the short haul method directly to Lupine Meadows with a ranger attending the climber during the short haul transport. He and another injured climber were then flown by an Air Idaho ambulance to Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

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Four other climbers were able to traverse from the Friction Pitch to a rappel station above the upper saddle of the Grand Teton and descend to the Lower Saddle. They continued to hike down to their backcountry campsite in the Moraines area of Garnet Canyon, where they plan to spend the night.

The deceased female was flown by helicopter from the mountain and transported to the Teton County coroner in Jackson, Wyoming, who will determine the cause of death.

Names of the climbers and other details were not available at the time of this press release. News media may contact the public affairs office, after 2:00 p.m. MDT on Sunday, July 27, for further information.

This marks the eleventh major search and rescue in the park this year, and the third fatality.

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